

Camp Washington History (Summary)

- Camp Washington is located on the eastern side of the Mill Creek Valley between the West End and Cumminsville-Northside. Camp Washington is defined by - the canal on the east, the Mill Creek on the west, Alfred Street on the south, and the intersection of Spring Grove Avenue and the railroad tracks on the north. This has given the area a more distinct identity. The land on which Mohawk, Brighton and Camp Washington are located was purchased from John Cleves Symmes by a number of individuals, some as speculators, others as settlers. By 1792-1793, the latter had established a small community with a blockhouse. One of the largest landholders there was John Riddle, and the semi-fortified hamlet was commonly known as Riddles station. It was located on the east side of the military road (present day Colerain Avenue) leading out of Cincinnati on a site that is now occupied by I-75, just north of the Western Hills Viaduct.
- The Mill Creek Valley was already an important transportation corridor for roads out of the Cincinnati basin. The Miami & Erie Canal was constructed in 1825-1827 on level ground on the east side of the creek, making the valley even more accessible. A typical crossroads business district with taverns, an inn, and a hotel grew up at the intersection of Central and Harrison Avenues in a village that became known as Brighton. By the 1830's, slaughterhouses were established near Clearwater and Bank Streets and emptying into the Mill Creek. Across the canal at the foot of the rugged hillside, a small residential community known as Mohawk developed. In the 1840s, speculators started subdividing property in this vicinity, which was within fairly easy walking distance of Cincinnati. In 1849, the city annexed Mohawk and Brighton as part of the special road district of Mill Creek, and development accelerated. Small factories, breweries, and meatpacking houses were set up, particularly near the canal. While new homes and commercial buildings were being erected in Mohawk and Brighton, that part of the valley immediately to the north remained largely undeveloped. The availability of large tracts of land in this area attracted activities that required substantial space. During the Mexican War, an army camp was set up about midway between Brighton and Cumminsville. Known as Camp Washington, this site was the muster and drill grounds of the First and Second Regiments of Ohio Volunteer Infantry. The camp was broken up in 1848, but the name remained in use.
- Camp Washington was also the site of the first Ohio State Fair in 1850. When the city of Cincinnati needed construction sites for two very large facilities – the House of Refuge (1850) and the Workhouse (1866) – it chose Camp Washington, even though the area was not annexed until 1870.

- During the second half of the nineteenth century, new transportation routes were run through the Mill Creek Valley. The Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad (CH&D) was built in the early 1850s, and a horse car line between Brighton and downtown began service in 1859. In 1861, a new road, Spring Grove avenue was built from Brighton to the large cemetery beyond Cumminsville; six years later, the Cincinnati & Marietta rail line was laid directly through Brighton and Camp Washington. The combination of railroads and available land brought the livestock and packing businesses to Camp Washington.
- As the land around the slaughterhouses of Brighton and the Deer Creek Valley became more developed, these plants, with their offensive sights and smells, were unpopular neighbors. Also, the owners of firms engaged in stockhandling, slaughtering, meatpacking, and by-product processing saw a need to consolidate their operations. In 1871, the Union Stockyard Company was organized to set up a more efficient centralized stockyard complex. By 1873, this organization had set up a large stockhandling facility in Camp Washington. By the 1880s, almost all of Cincinnati's slaughterhouses and many of the packing and processing companies had relocated near the Union Stockyards. A number of manufacturing firms also began relocating there. Some of these plants were new establishments, but many were older firms that left the riverfront or the West End to build larger or more modern facilities. The growing industrial activity attracted working class residents, many of them recent immigrants from eastern Europe. By 1910, Camp Washington was a predominantly lower middle-income community with 10,000 to 11,000 inhabitants.
- By 1930, Camp Washington had more than 11,800 residents, and Mohawk Brighton had several thousand. The people and industries in the Mill Creek Valley suffered during the Depression and were hit hard by the flood of 1937. In the 1940s, the number of companies and the population declined. Although defense work during World War II and the Korean War revitalized some companies, many of the meatpackers closed or reduced their operations. Other plants moved out of the valley, seeking more up to date or spacious quarters. At the same time, many of the residents began moving to newer suburbs, particularly those in the western hills area.
- Camp Washington was affected by the construction of the I-75 expressway during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Housing and factories were demolished as the road was built. Although the highway did not cut directly through Camp Washington business district, enterprises in both areas increasingly suffered from the competition of new shopping centers, lack of parking, restricted access, and population decline. In 1970, Camp Washington had only 3,147 residents, and by 1980, the number had fallen to 2198.

- City governments primary hope for improving conditions in Mohawk, Brighton and Camp Washington was industrial development. As early as 1948, the Metropolitan Master Plan had described these areas as “deteriorated” and predicted that they would change from mixed residential industrial districts into a region of warehouses and factories. It was not until 1948, however, that the City Planning Department created a detailed industrial development plan for any of this area, and then covered only Camp Washington.
- As of the late 1980s, the hoped-for major development projects still had not begun, but this section of the Mill Creek Valley, while a troubled residential area, remained an important industrial district with approximately 200 different firms employing more than 7,000 workers.

Bibliography

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